

Chairman Deborah A.P. Hersman  
Opening Statement  
Pipeline Accident Report –  
San Bruno, California,  
September 9, 2010  
Washington, DC — August 30, 2011

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Good morning. Welcome to the Boardroom of the National Transportation Safety Board. I am Debbie Hersman, and it is my privilege to serve as Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board. Joining me are my fellow Board members: Vice Chairman Chris Hart, Member Robert Sumwalt, Member Mark Rosekind, and Member Earl Weener.

Please take a moment to identify the exits. There are two on each side in the front of the room and the one in back where you entered.

Today, we meet in open session, as required by the Government in Sunshine Act, to consider the September 9, 2010, pipeline rupture in the Crestmoor neighborhood of San Bruno, California.

On behalf of my fellow Board members and the entire NTSB staff, I offer our deepest condolences to the families and friends of the eight people who lost their lives in this accident. The rupture and subsequent fire also injured 58 people, destroyed 38 homes, and damaged 70 more homes. We know lives were forever changed by this tragic accident and that nothing can replace the loss of your loved one or repair the trauma of a life-changing injury.

Joining us today is Congresswoman Jackie Speier. Congresswoman Speier has been a tireless advocate for her constituents and for improving pipeline safety.

San Bruno Mayor Jim Ruane and City Manager Connie Jackson are here, too. They, along with many others, have played a key role in their community's work to rebuild homes and restore the neighborhood's infrastructure.

In March, we held a public hearing on this accident. As I did then, let me recognize the groups that responded to the accident, especially the first responders in the San Bruno community who helped in the moments and early hours after the explosion. In the 50 hours after the rupture more than 900

firefighting and law enforcement personnel responded. Others pitched in as well, including many off-duty Pacific Gas and Electric Company employees.

I want to acknowledge the outstanding work of Vice Chairman Hart, who was the Board member on scene in the immediate days following the rupture, and represented the Board before the Congress in subsequent hearings on the accident.

In June, Member Rosekind and I visited San Bruno. We saw a community that still mourns its many losses. Yet, as we saw the first concrete being poured, we also saw the resilience of the citizens of San Bruno to rebuild their homes ... and their lives.

We now have the opportunity — and we all have the obligation — to take every step possible to ensure that the lessons of this tragedy are well-learned and that the circumstances are not repeated. Over the past two weeks, the Board Members have read the proposed report and individually met with NTSB staff to discuss the draft. Today, however, is the first time that all of the Board Members are meeting together to discuss it.

Staff will make presentations on some of the major issues examined in the final report. The presentations will be followed by questions from the Board Members. We will then consider the conclusions, probable cause, and safety recommendations. Because these are the Board's actual deliberations on the report, it may be revised as a result of actions taken during this meeting. Approximately 30 minutes after we conclude, an abstract of this report will be posted on the NTSB's website, and the final report will be available in several weeks.

It is imperative to share what we've learned about this devastating explosion. Pipelines are pervasive; they run throughout the country and throughout our communities to provide energy to our homes and businesses. Today, in the United States there are some 2.5 million miles of pipelines — more than ten times the distance from the Earth to the Moon. These include 300,000 miles of gas transmission pipelines. Because pipelines are usually underground, most people don't even know they exist, much less where they are located. Therefore, it is incumbent on pipeline operators and regulators to ensure that the nation's pipelines are safe.

On September 9, 2010, PG&E's Line 132 ruptured. It took more than 90 minutes to shut the upstream and downstream valves and during that time 47 million cubic feet of natural gas was released. That gas was enough to run 1,200 residential households for one year.

The rupture also left a crater at the crossroads of the Crestmoor neighborhood about 26-feet wide and 72-feet long. It left a community asking, “Who is responsible for our safety?”

This accident represents a snapshot in time, and we recognize that individuals in the system work hard every day – at PG&E, CPUC, and PHMSA – to keep our pipelines safe. But good intentions did not prevent this accident from happening, Opportunities were missed that could have – and should have – prevented this tragedy. We acknowledge that in the intervening months since the accident, much has been learned and commitments to change have been made. But we’re here today to talk about what led to the rupture on September 9, 2010.

Today, you will hear troubling revelations ... about a company that exploited weaknesses in a lax system of oversight and government agencies that placed a blind trust in operators to the detriment of public safety.

We know now that this tragedy began years ago with PG&E’s 1956 installation of a woefully inadequate pipe. It was compounded over the years by a litany of failures — including poor recordkeeping, inadequate inspection programs, and an integrity management program without integrity.

This is not the first NTSB investigation involving PG&E. In August 1981, following a pipeline rupture in San Francisco, it took PG&E more than nine hours to shut down the gas flow. The NTSB found inadequate recordkeeping as a contributing cause in that event.

Then, in the investigation of a 2008 house explosion caused by PG&E’s gas distribution pipeline in Rancho Cordova, California, NTSB identified similar issues, including lack of quality control during pipe installation and inadequate emergency response procedures.

Now, it’s Sept. 2010. Another explosion. Eight people killed.

Today, you will hear about flawed pipe ... flawed operations ... flawed oversight.

It was not a question of if this pipeline would burst. It was a question of when.

Dr. Mayer, will you please introduce the staff.

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